

company's shares trading at £2.43 in November 2003 having dropped to as low as £2.20 earlier in the year. The financial difficulties were being compounded by tenants whose leases were coming up for renewal seeking lower rates than they were currently paying to remain at Canary Wharf (Timmons, 2003). The physical environment is, however, there for everybody to see.

The architecture of the buildings has been described as 'post-modern classical'. Marble, limestone, brick, steel and glass are the primary building materials. A unity of design is achieved through the round corner towers at the entrances to the squares, the pedimented façades facing the Thames, the window grid applied and the attic story setbacks. The buildings were designed by major global architectural practices such as Kohn Pederson Fox, I. M. Pei, Troughton McAslan and César Pelli. Pelli (Architect of the World Financial Center at Battery Park City) was hired by Olympia and York to design the key building, One Canada Square, which is one of three landmark towers that can be seen from a distance. It is a relatively plain 800-foot (245-metre) Modernist building of stainless steel and glass with a reconstituted limestone base. It is an architecturally subdued building. It is distinguished primarily by its location at the end of the axis and by its height (see Figure 8.17).

The design controls have resulted in Canary Wharf being considerably less flamboyant than much commercial architecture of the 1990s. Contemporary critics saw this character as negative but it seems to be aging well in our contemporary critics' eyes. An important urban design difference between Canary Wharf and La Défense is

that the buildings have street addresses so they can be reached from the street. At La Défense the pedestrian zones are largely undifferentiated. Perhaps this detail is something that SOM brought with them from their American experience (Figure 8.18).

The project has been both damned and praised. The lack of concern for the infrastructure necessary for the working population, particularly in public transportation, was severely criticized by all and sundry. The problem has now been largely addressed. A direct link to Heathrow airport and Liverpool Street station is still at the proposal level and Canary Wharf firms are lobbying hard for it. There is also a proposal for a monorail connection to the heart of the City. Canary Wharf has been criticized for its bland, cheap, hermetically sealed architecture and finishes. It has been unfairly dismissed as the 'architectural expression of Thatcherism'. There are, however, problems. The sick building syndrome has, apparently, been common. The office monoculture that isolated the development from the social difficulties of people in its surroundings has also been the subject of negative commentary. Outsiders regard Canary Wharf as a private estate.

On the positive side the master plan has been praised for the quality of its landscaping: its circuses, squares and tree-lined streets. The individuality of the buildings designed by different architects (i.e. its all-of-a-piece urban design quality) has also been regarded as an achievement of merit. The overall success of the endeavour remains to be seen. It has, nevertheless, already achieved its primary goal of relieving, but not eliminating, pressure on the City.